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I conducted field reviews across the North Zone Roadside Salvage Environmental Assessment project area during the months of June through September 2010 in order to review proposed treatment areas to determine if the activities would meet or exceed Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives (VQO's). I also obtained a collection of photographs of the existing visual characteristics. These photos were used to analyze the possible effects of proposed vegetative treatments on the visual quality and also are to be used for future monitoring once the project is implemented.

Through the public scoping process it was determined that scenery management was not a significant issue that would drive alternative development.

As a guide for conducting this visual analysis, I have referenced The Scenery Management System (VMS) Handbook #462 and also Agriculture Handbook Number 701, titled "Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management (draft) which defines a system, referred to as the Scenery Management System (SMS), for the inventory and analysis of the aesthetic values of National Forest Lands. The SMS system has evolved from and will eventually replace the Visual Management System (VMS). However, to be consistent with the current Forest Plan, the VMS system is used to determine if project activities are meeting Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs).

Definitions of the various Visual Quality Objectives are as follows:

Maximum Modification (MM) VQO – A Visual Quality Objective meaning human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape but should appeal as a natural occurrence when viewed as background.

Modification (M) VQO - A Visual Quality Objective meaning human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color and texture. It should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed in foreground or middleground.

Partial Retention (PR) VQO – A Visual Quality Objective which in general means human activities may be evident but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape.

Retention (R) VQO – A Visual Quality Objective which in general means human activities are not evident to the casual forest visitor.

Preservation (P) VQO – A Visual Quality Objective that provides for ecological change only.

Enhancement – A short-term management alternative which is done with the express purpose of increasing positive visual variety where little variety now exists.

Rehabilitation – A short-term management alternative used to return existing visual impacts in the natural landscape to a desired visual quality.

Project Activities

The North Zone Roadside Salvage Environmental Assessment includes 3 action alternatives, and Alternative 2 is the preferred action.

Road Maintenance, Including Roadside Vegetation Clearing areas - Alternatives 2 and 3 include road maintenance work along-side 632 miles of road. The work would consist of cutting and removal of utilizable brush and trees within the maintenance clearing limits, which is about 10-20 feet off road shoulders; ditch work; relief pipe and culvert cleaning or replacements and; spot graveling and blading. Alternatives 1 and 4 are similar to Alternatives 2 and 3 but would not include utilization of forest products and wouldn't involve cutting trees larger than about 6 inches in diameter. Vegetation cut under Alternatives 1 and 4 would be either mulched or scattered off the roadsides.

Roadside Salvage areas – Alternatives 2 and 4 include salvage operations that would be conducted along-side about 430 of the 632 total miles in the project area and with the exception of landings would not include machinery use off-road. Salvage would be accomplished by having equipment remain on the road surfaces and winching dead standing, down and hazard trees to the roadside that are within 200 feet of the road shoulders. It is estimated that ¼ acre-sized landings may be needed for each mile of road to be treated in the project area, which would total about 158 acres that effect less than 1 percent of the total project treatment area. Existing landings and turnouts suitable for small landings will be utilized where feasible in order to minimize the need to create new ones. Alternatives 1 and 3 do not include salvage operations.

Project VQOs

All roads within the project area are within areas having a Partial Retention VQO. These are level 2 sensitivity roads that pass through common scenery areas and the proposed activities will only be visually noticeable from foreground viewing areas while driving on these roads.

Determinations

All alternatives, as designed, will meet the Visual Quality Objective of Partial Retention. In order to provide for enhanced visual effects, it is recommended that the following implementation features be included when feasible:

1. Where conducting roadside vegetation clearing, leave an occasional large diameter tree (i.e. greater than 14 inches if available) approximately every quarter of a mile. Cottonwood, aspen and larch trees would be preferred due to their ability to turn colors in the fall. Also, misshapen “character trees” of any species could be left to enhance the viewing area along treated roads. If leave-tree paint is used, paint only on the side of the tree facing away from the road.
2. In areas where biomass can’t be removed after cutting in the roadside clearing areas and if brush piling and burning is necessary, it would be better from a visual standpoint to create many small piles rather than fewer large piles so that large burn patches aren’t noticeable alongside roads.
3. Where new landings are needed, try to locate them in roadside areas that are already somewhat open in order to minimize creating obvious new openings. Some new landings may be located where they can open up vistas of Priest Lake, Lake Pend Oreille or nearby and distance mountains also.
4. Minimize the use of boundary paint when feasible. Use of biodegradable flashers are recommended, especially for roadside clearing work. This is less important for roadside salvage boundaries that are located 100-200 feet off road shoulders.

Estimated Effectiveness - High

Visual monitoring of past roadside vegetation removals which have used the above design criteria have shown success in maintaining VQOs. The proposed road maintenance and salvage treatments should enhance the general publics’ roadside viewing experience within the project area.

Barry Wynsma, Paraprofessional Landscape Architect

Attached: Representative photos of predicted before and after effects of treatments.

**REPRESENTATIVE VIEW OF FOREST ROAD PRIOR TO ROADSIDE
VEGETATION CLEARING AND SALVAGE**



**Twentymile Road FR #408, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, before a roadside
vegetation clearing project commenced under the Black Mountain Road
Maintenance project.**

**REPRESENTATIVE VIEW OF FOREST ROAD IMMEDIATELY AFTER
ROADSIDE VEGETATION REMOVAL (20 foot clearing).**



Twentymile Road, FR #408, approximately one week after clearing work was completed.

**REPRESENTATIVE VIEW OF FOREST ROAD 20 YEARS AFTER
ROADSIDE VEGETATION CLEARING**



Snow Creek Road FR #402, Bonners Ferry Ranger District. This roadside was cleared of vegetation out to 30 feet off the road shoulder approximately 20 years ago. Note larger diameter cottonwood trees left in clearing limits for visual enhancement purposes.